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Management Training

for Supervisors and Staff Officers

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UNIT 7 Communications

Soil Conservation Service
U. S. Department of Agriculture

COMMUNICATIONS

OBJECTIVES

To help us understand:

- (a) importance of communication,
 - (b) communication problems,
 - (c) how to improve the talking-listening process, and
 - (d) how to improve the writing-reading process.
-

Supervisors must make themselves understood.

One of the important things a supervisor has to do every day is to make himself understood by his people, and to understand in turn what they try to convey to him. This two-way process is usually labelled communication, and a great deal depends upon it. If a supervisor and his people cannot or do not communicate very well, the work they must perform will suffer accordingly. This need for communication is not confined to the field of supervision; it poses the same problem in any field. Wherever people are trying to do something together -- build a bridge, run a government, or establish world peace -- what they get done depends on how well they understand each other.

Understanding brings accomplishment.

Misunderstanding causes trouble.

People have been misunderstanding each other for a very long time. Misunderstanding can easily lead to dislike, enmity, or hatred, and it has frequently led to war between nations. It is far wiser for a supervisor to think carefully about his own skill in conveying and receiving ideas, than it is to assume, without thinking, that he already knows all he needs to know about the subject.

People communicate by talking and listening or writing and reading.

There are two important ways in which people communicate, that is, convey ideas to one another. They do it by a process involving talking and listening. Or, they do it by a process involving writing and

Sending and receiving
messages require
skill.

People believe
communicating is
easy.

We take too much for
granted.

Talking and listening;
reading and writing
are not simple
skills.

reading. In both of these processes, one person sends a message and another person receives it. Both the sending and the receiving, in both processes, require considerable skill.

The principal trouble in this matter of communicating is that so many people think it is really no problem at all. Talking and listening, and reading and writing are usually thought of as things everyone knows how to do. The fact is, however, that each of these skills has to be studied and learned, and one does not necessarily learn them by going to school. Many supervisors have failed because they assumed that any or all of the following simple statements were true:

1. Anyone who talks plainly to another person will always be understood.
2. Anyone can listen to another person talking and easily understand his meaning.
3. Anyone can write what he means on paper, and his meaning will be understood by anyone else who reads it.
4. Anyone can read what someone else has written and understand what the writer meant.

All these statements are dangerous generalizations. They are not "trick" statements, nor do they contain any hidden meanings. All of them assume perfectly ordinary situations involving the language we use every day. The statements imply that talking and listening, and reading and writing are really quite simple skills you learn more or less as you grow up -- at home, in school, among your friends.

It is dangerous, however, to take these four skills for granted. Many books have been written about language, how we use it, its weaknesses, and its deceptions. Here we will discuss four aspects of communicating that any supervisor should learn. The four aspects are these:

Supervisors must develop skills in speaking-listening and writing-reading processes.

1. A supervisor must be able to speak clearly.
2. He must be able to listen.
3. He must be able to write clearly.
4. He must be able to reading with understanding.

TALKING-LISTENING

Most people have more trouble with listening than with talking.

Of the two skills involved in the talking-listening process, most people seem to have the greatest trouble with listening. They assume that listening is the same thing as hearing, and that anyone who hears is therefore listening. And, it is true that if your hearing is impaired, you will have more difficulty listening than a normal person will. But listening, as we are using the word here, requires not only that you hear, but also that you understand what you hear. To do this you must think about what you hear another person say when he is talking to you. Actually your speaker may not be too skillful in getting his ideas across to you.

Be an active, demanding listener.

The key to successful listening is to be an active, demanding listener. The idea is that you try as hard as you can to be sure you understand correctly what a speaker is trying to tell you. This means that you cannot be thinking of what you're going to say as soon as your speaker pauses for breath. Instead, you think about his meaning. This takes some effort if you haven't tried it before -- and many people have not. We are often so anxious to get our own ideas across that we try to do all the talking, and hence we miss what others want to tell us. We need to devote our whole attention to the business of listening.

Keep questions in mind as you listen.

Now it happens that scientists have developed some valuable and important ideas about listening. This has been done notably by the psychologists, and by specialists in general semantics, which has to do with the relation between language and human behavior. The semanticists suggest that there are three key questions a good listener should keep in mind as he listens to a speaker. We list them first, then discuss each one. Here they are:

Speaker's words may have different meaning to him than to you.

1. What does the speaker mean; i.e., what is he trying to say?
2. How does he know; i.e., what evidence has he for what he says?
3. What is he leaving out?

1. What does the speaker mean?

Your job to find out what meaning he intends.

Several ideas are important to bear in mind here. In the first place we need to realize that the meaning of the speaker is not in the words he uses. You simply cannot assume that he uses words exactly the same way you do. He uses them his way, and he is different from you. The meaning of what he says is in the speaker, not in the words. What you do, therefore, is to start your listening with the idea that you don't know what the speaker's words mean to him -- and you must spare no pains to find out. You begin to probe. You ask questions -- "Do I understand you to mean.?" "Is this what you are saying?" "If I understand you correctly, you mean....." and you tell him in your own words what you think he meant in order to find out whether you understood him correctly. (This is known to semanticists as "feedback")

Check your understanding of the speaker's words.

It is especially important to check your understanding when the speaker is using what we think of as ordinary, simple, non-technical words. It is usually safe to assume you understand correctly when a speaker uses a technical word -- providing you know its meaning. For example, if he talks about sodium chloride, you may be sure he is talking about table salt, since sodium chloride is the chemical term for table salt -- and it has no other meaning. But for the commonly used words there are many meanings. For example, if I tell you that I saw an interesting tie the other day, you do not know whether I am talking about a necktie, or a football game, a tie on a railroad track, or something else. We are told on good authority that the 500 most used words in the English language have a total of some 14,000 meanings as listed in the Oxford dictionary.

500 English words have 14,000 meanings.

2. How does the speaker know?

This question does not imply that you should take a challenging position with the speaker.

Look for facts.

Instead, you try to find out the basis for what the speaker is saying. You look for the facts, the evidence, behind what he is saying. You ask more questions. How did you learn this? Why do you say so-and-so? How do you know? Can you show me?

Ask questions
diplomatically.

You ask such questions diplomatically, after your speaker has finished what he has to say. What you want, remember, is to understand what the speaker means. To help you do this, you are trying to discover how correct and how factual his statements are.

3. What is the speaker leaving out?

What did the speaker
leave unsaid?

It may occur to you at this point to wonder how you can possibly listen for something that is not spoken. And here we have an important difference between hearing and listening. You cannot, of course, hear what is not said. But as you listen, you may discover a number of things that your speaker leaves unsaid. He may leave out important facts and details. He may favor one conclusion when you can see that there are several others. And, he may not see or say anything about the implications of the conclusion he does favor. All this takes work on your part. But remember, we pointed out in the beginning that successful listening cannot be passive. It must be active; it must be demanding.

SOME GENERAL RULES ABOUT LISTENING

Besides the three questions a skilled listener needs to keep in mind, and use, there are a few general rules that can also help him listen. Most of these come to us from the psychologists. They are not difficult to observe, although they are widely neglected.

Relax as you listen.

First of all, it is important to relax when you are listening. If you strain too hard, you are likely to find it correspondingly harder to understand. Extensive, controlled experiments by the U. S. Navy during the last war, with airplane personnel, confirmed this idea, which was already a familiar one to the psychologists.

Hear the speaker out.

Listen actively and
carefully.

This helps the speaker.

These same Navy experiments showed too that a second general rule was important, a rule that the professional psychologists have been using for many years, especially since the time of Dr. Sigmund Freud. This rule is: Hear the speaker out. Let him talk until he is finished. Don't cut him off, don't contradict him in the middle of his statement, don't start looking out the window. Listen actively and carefully to what he says all the way through. Then, you start asking your questions. This simple approach often has the effect of helping a speaker say more plainly what he means. To find his listener actually waiting until he is finished is quite likely to be flattering to the speaker. He finds that you seem interested in what he has to say, and he will work all the harder to be sure you understand his meaning.

Listen patiently --
without passing
judgment or giving
advice.

This leads us to a third general rule which embodies a familiar method of the psychologists. This is to listen patiently, without passing judgment or giving advice. The idea is to let the man speak as freely and fully as possible without fear of censure or blame. This procedure is known to the psychologists and psychiatrists as non-directive counseling. The listener has to be patient; he usually confines his remarks to restating what the speaker has said in slightly different words. This causes the speaker to feel that not only is he being listened to, but he is truly being understood. When the speaker gets through, you most specifically do not tell him you think he's foolish, or stupid, or prejudiced -- even if you think so. Instead, you go ahead using your three questions.

Disregard symbols of
authority.

Our fourth general rule is an interesting one. It is that in order to listen well, one must disregard symbols of authority as such. We cannot listen effectively if we are over-awed or impressed by a speaker's title, or name, or rank, or academic degree, or uniform, or wealth, or position. These things are not necessarily evidence that what he is saying is reliable or valid. You evaluate his statements as usual, patiently hearing him out, then using your three questions. In the words of Wendell Johnson, whose ideas we have been using liberally here, "The quality of his (the speaker's) voice, the color of his skin, the slant of his eyes, his height, weight, and

apparent age guarantee nothing with respect to the wisdom or foolishness of what he says. Truth can be lisped, stuttered, or twanged through the nose just as well as it can be molded by a meticulous Harvard or Oxford tongue. It can be mispronounced. It may be ungrammatical. Whether it comes in a satin case or a paper bag is a matter of no importance. To a general semanticist, the Men of Distinction are first of all, and often solely, just colored pictures. The art of listening involves realistic appraisal of the conventional symbols of authority, as such."¹/

Listening involves a realistic appraisal of conventional symbols of authority.

THE OTHER HALF OF THE TALKING-LISTENING PROCESS

Speaker must do his part in communicating.

Let us now put ourselves in the position of the speaker. Let us assume that when we speak, our listeners are going to be active, demanding listeners, bent on trying to understand us. Let us be sure to note, in passing, that we mean a speaker talking to one or two people, not to a large audience. Now, what can we do to bring about the best possible communication?

Speak with care. Choose words well. Clarify each point. Try for completeness.

Clearly, we need to think about our listeners, and be just as active in trying to get our meaning across as they will be in trying to understand us. Our listeners will hear us out -- so, we are as brief as the subject permits. We speak with care, choosing our words well, clarifying each point as well as we are able. Since our listeners will want the evidence for our statements, we take pains to provide it. We try for truth as objectively as we can. Our listeners will be watching for what we leave out -- so we try for completeness in our statements from beginning to end. In every way possible to us, we try to think of our audience, that is, our listeners, and how clearly they may be able to get our meaning.

Slow speakers get across better.

All this is no more than using the ideas about listening in reverse. But there are some other things we know that help us when we are doing the talking. The same Navy experiments we mentioned earlier also brought out some useful points about speaking. They showed, for example, that speakers who talked too fast didn't get across as well as those who spoke more slowly. This was especially true

¹/ Wendell Johnson, "Do You Know How to Listen" in Etc. Magazine for Autumn, 1949, pp. 3-9.

Short sentences help.

Use voice inflection
for emphasis and
clarity.

Think before you speak.

if the speakers used simpler, more commonly used words. It helped also if speakers made a real effort to talk in short sentences and to use patterns of inflection that would help to bring out meaning. From these experiments we can say, therefore, that (1) speakers should avoid talking too fast; (2) they should use plain and simple words; (3) they should speak in shorter, rather than longer sentences; (4) they should use the inflection of their voices to lend emphasis and clarity. What this means in a nutshell is that speakers are well advised to think before they speak.

Further helps to speakers trying for good communication come from Irving Lee. In his book, "How to Talk With People," he suggests a number of things speakers will do well to avoid. Some of these are:

Avoid:

Blunt contradiction.

1. Try to avoid bluntly contradicting those with whom you are talking. You should be trying for understanding, not just to make your listeners angry.

Inflammatory words or
name-calling.

2. It is unwise to use inflammatory words or to descend to name-calling. If you say or imply that a man is a Communist, he's likely to get angry. If you call him any kind of nasty name, or otherwise insult him, you will usually get the same effect. This does not help communication at all; it only defeats it.

Generalities.

3. Try to avoid generalities whenever it is possible to be specific. For example, you may have had a bad experience with two supervisors, but you cannot therefore generalize that all supervisors are no good. You can, however, state that with two particular supervisors whom you observed, your experience was not good.

Finality.

4. Try not to sound final in your statements. Put them on a tentative basis, and say or imply that you are still looking for a better conclusion. For example, if you say: "This is the only way we can do this," you may arouse more argument than if you say, "So far, this way looks pretty good, but another way may have occurred to you. Has it?"

Avoid:

Talking down to listeners.

5. Try not to "talk down" to your listeners. If you give the impression that you think you know all there is to know about your subject, your listeners may form the opinion that you are conceited or overconfident. This does not help understanding.

Becoming angry.

6. You personally, as a speaker, will do well to avoid becoming angry at your listeners. Likewise you should avoid feeling that if a man disagrees with you he is therefore either a fool or stupid. And, keep in mind that when a man differs with you, he is not necessarily conducting a personal attack on your integrity.

The "hard approach."

7. Avoid using the "hard approach" rather than the "soft approach." Introduce your critical or contradictory statements with such simple phrases as "I wonder if we could look at it this way..... You may be right, but would you be willing to consider?..... You may know more about this than I, and I hesitate to say, but..... I realize you have a very good point, although perhaps we might look at it this way...." Studies of arguments in conferences made by Irving Lee indicate pretty clearly that the "gentle phrase" or soft approach tends to reduce markedly people's resistance to criticism. On the other hand, the blunt, hard approach tends to ruffle feelings of the listeners -- and agreement is more difficult to reach.

Soft approach must be sincere.

This soft approach must be sincere. Lee's simple studies showed that it made some difference about two-thirds of the time. And he suggests that if you don't get results with the soft approach in a given situation, why, discard it for other methods.

THE WRITING-READING PROCESS

Simple ways of writing and reading can be learned by anyone.

At the outset we must be clear that we are not concerned here with writing or reading literary masterpieces. Our intent is to discuss some simple ways of writing and reading that may help us improve in communicating with one another. Anyone of ordinary intelligence who is able to read and write, can learn these simple methods.

Ease of comprehension of
reading material
influenced by education.

Many experts have worked on the problem of making writing as readable as possible. All of them have approached the problem on somewhat the same basis. They have taken sizeable groups of people and tested their comprehension of different kinds of written material. They ascertained the kind of writing that was easily understood by people with 5th grade educations, 6th grade, 7th grade, and so on, up through college. People who have graduated from grammar school, that is, the 8th grade, in general, can read somewhat more difficult material than can those who stopped their education at lower grades. High school graduates can read -- with ease -- more difficult material than can be easily and comfortably read by 8th grade graduates. College graduates can do still better. On the basis of many years of study of hundreds of people and their reading comprehension, various formulas have been developed. These formulas can be used to classify most kinds of written material.

Fog Index formula
developed by
Gunning.

We use here a formula developed by Robert Gunning, a communications expert, in his book, "The Technique of Clear Writing," published by McGraw-Hill in 1952. His formula is not necessarily the best, but it is by all odds the simplest to use. The Gunning formula enables you to arrive at what he calls the "Fog Index." The higher the index, the more "fog" there is in the written material. The lower the index, the less "fog." Gunning's formula is a quick way to estimate how easy or how hard any piece of writing is. This is the way you use it:

Quick way to estimate
reading difficulty.

Use 100-word samples.

1. Count off 100 words in the written material you want to test. Make a mark at the end of the 100th word. If the material is quite long, take several such samples, say at every 10th page.

Figure average length
of sentences.

2. Figure the average length of sentence that ends nearest (either before or after) the 100-word mark. For example, if 2 sentences make up 104 words, the average length is 52 words. If there are 10 sentences in 96 words, the average length is 96 divided by 10 or 9.6 words.

Count hard words --
three syllable or more.

Add number of hard words
to average sentence
length. Multiply by 0.4.

Hard words underscored.

3. Next count the number of "hard words" -- words of 3 syllables or more -- in the 100-word sample. (The word "next" has one syllable; "number" has 2; "syllable" has 3 syllables.) In doing this don't count capitalized words, such as Paris, London, President, etc. Don't count words that are combinations of short-easy words (like bookkeeper or whitecollar). And don't count words that have a third syllable when ed or es is added to them (like expected or refuses).
4. Lastly you do the figuring. First, add the number of hard words for the entire sample, to the average sentence length. Then multiply the sum by 0.4. This will give you the fog index. The factor of 0.4 relates the sum to school-grade reading level. You may take our word for it that the formula really works, even if you don't understand why. If you're interested in the theory behind the formula, read Gunning's book mentioned above.

Now let's apply this yardstick. We'll take a piece out of recent bulletin on supervision that is shown below. We've underscored the hard words.

"There is need also for much additional basic and applied research: research to determine the major duties of super-
visors' jobs, the differences among them, and the situations which help determine the qualifications needed, and to develop new methods for evalua-
tion; and applied research to test the validity of new and existing selection methods on the supervisors of many different types of supervisory positions. Much more than half of the total research work reported here is based on supervisors of blue-collar workers, an important group, but far from being the only group for whom supervisory selection is important. The organiza-
tion of"/ -- our line here stops us at the end of 100 words.

Count hard words.

Determine average
sentence length.

Calculate.

Fog Index 28.2 is tough
reading for everyone.

Now try it on your own
writing.

Test instructional
material and popular
magazines.

Even college graduates
like simple writing.

This passage contains 97 words through the sentence that ends nearest the 100-word mark. There are 2 sentences. So we divide 97 by 2 to get 48.5. All the words underscored add up to 22 hard words. (Note we didn't count "reported" or "blue-collar.")

Now we do our simple calculation:

Add	48.5	(average sentence length)
	<u>+22</u>	(hard words)
Total	70.5	

Multiply by 0.4

28.20 - the Fog Index

As it happens, there simply isn't any 28th grade in school. Our sample indicates that the writing would be hard to read for everyone, regardless of his school education. The writer must expect to find that his readers will be few, and of these few, only a handful may spend the time and effort required to understand what he meant.

Before you smile at this example, better test some of your own writing -- one of your letters, a memorandum, or something else you have written. Many people are shocked to discover that they habitually write with a fog index far above college reading level. Certainly a great many government memorandums have fog indexes of 20 to 30, which means that the people who must read them have considerable difficulty understanding them. Worse, when especially difficult memorandums are completely misunderstood -- as they so frequently are -- the activities involved may become very badly snarled. Test some of the instructional material you get from time to time. Test an article or two in the Readers' Digest or Ladies Home Journal which scales their reading ease to reach the largest possible number of educated adults.

In the following table you can see how the Fog Index relates to reading level. There are some samples given of magazines that illustrate the reading level. The percent figures in the third column show the number of people in the United States (expressed in percent) who have reached the grades shown. For example, 80% of us have had at least an 8th grade education, and we can read with ease any material with a Fog Index of 8. Note that even college graduates can read such material with ease, not just grammar school graduates.

Fog Index	Reading Level by Grade	Percent of People Reaching Grade	By Magazine
17	College Graduate	2.3	Scientific Professional
16	College Senior	6.8	Yale Review
15	College Junior		(No popular magazine this difficult)
14	College Sophomore		
13	College Freshman	15	
12	High School Senior	41	Atlantic Monthly
11	High School Junior		Harper's
10	High School Sophomore		Time
9	High School Freshman	64	Readers' Digest
8	8th Grade	80	Ladies' Home Journal
7	7th Grade		True Confessions
6	6th Grade		Pulps generally
5	5th Grade	91	Comics

Rewrite to improve.

Now we might get back to our sample and try making it easier to read. In doing this we are somewhat handicapped because we are not sure exactly what the writer meant. He could have done a much better job than we can do. Here is a rewrite, with the hard words underscored as before:

This is better.

Much easier to read.

"We need more research. We need to know the major duties of supervisors' jobs and how they differ. We must know what qualifications a supervisor should have for any given situation. We must learn how to judge these. We need to study how valid our selection methods are with supervisors in many kinds of jobs. Most of the research reported here has to do with supervisors of blue-collar workers. This is an important group, but it is far from being the only group for whom supervisory selection is important."

High school sophomore level.

As rewritten, the sample now contains 89 words. There are 7 sentences, so the average sentence length is 89 divided by 7, or 12.7. There are 11 hard words--that is, 12 percent of the 89 words are hard words, so we use 12 in the formula, thus:--

$$\begin{array}{r}
 12.7 \\
 \text{Add } \underline{12} \\
 24.7 \\
 \text{Multiply by } \underline{0.4} \\
 9.88, \text{ the Fog Index}
 \end{array}$$

Will be read by more
people with greater
understanding.

If the rewritten sample correctly expresses what the writer had in mind (which we don't know), then the written material is now easy and comfortable reading for anyone who has finished one year of high school. As such, it would probably be read by far more people, with greater understanding by far, than our original sample with a fog index of 28.2.

Reading ease more
important than brevity.

Notice, by the way, that we made no special effort to be brief. The rewritten piece happened to come out a little shorter than the original, but it might just as well have been longer. What we're saying is that ease of reading is more important than being brief, if brevity results in harder reading.

We may now draw some conclusions about communication writing, based on the use of a fog index, as follows:

Readers cannot ask
writer what he meant.

1. Just as a speaker must try to express himself as clearly as he can for his listener's sake, a writer must do likewise for the sake of his readers. A writer has an even harder task because his readers cannot ask him questions about what he meant. They can only ponder what he wrote.

Supervisors should check
readability of their
writing.

2. Supervisors who must write letters or memorandums -- or who must sign material written by others for him -- should have some means of judging how readable they will be. Gunning's Fog Index is one way this can be done. Another excellent method is explained by Rudolph Flesch, and this one is also worth study.^{2/}

Conscious effort required
to improve writing.

3. Because short sentences and simple words make reading easier, writers need to think about that fact as they write. You will find after a little practice, that you can indeed produce more easily readable material. But this does take conscious effort. It means also that when you write, you have two jobs to do.

^{2/} See Rudolph Flesch's book, "The Art of Readable Writing," Harper and Brothers, N.Y., 1949. 237 pp. This book is a lot of fun to read. Further, it's tremendously helpful to anyone trying to improve the clarity of his writing.

First your subject matter must be correct. Secondly, the way it is written has to be consciously scaled to the proper reading level of your readers.

SOME IDEAS ON READING

Give full and critical attention as you read.

We now come to consider the other half of the writing-reading process, that is, the business of trying to understand written material. In doing this we cannot do more than accord thoughtful and careful attention to it. There is no chance, ordinarily, to ask the writer what he meant. Of course, it is always possible to write a letter to an author or to the office where the memorandum came from. This takes extra time, and sometimes you may not realize that you have misread the material. What we're emphasizing here is that when you read something, give it your full and critical attention. Think of the 3 questions you'd ask of a speaker, restated as: (1) What does the writer mean? (2) What is the evidence for what he has written? (3) What has the writer left out? These may help you to understand what's on the page.

More to reading than critical study.

But there is far more to reading than the critical study aspect. So much material comes to us in printed or mimeographed form -- books, bulletins, magazines, newspapers, memorandums, handbooks, manuals, letters, etc., etc. Almost anyone trying to keep up with what's going on in the world, and in his own organization, is likely to get a little desperate about it. And there seems so little time to digest it all.

Rapid reading is an acquired skill.

For the slow reader the situation seems hopeless. He just can't seem to read fast enough to get through half the things he ought to. Or so he thinks. The fact is that people who can read rapidly weren't born that way. They've acquired their skill. Anyone who can read at all learn to read more rapidly providing he is trained, or trains himself, to do it. What this takes is the application of a little common sense plus practice.

1. Sorting

Sort what you read.

The common-sense angle has to do with sorting out what you really need to read. Sorting is really an organized approach to reading. It's often more important to a busy man than his ability to read rapidly.

You most certainly do not need to read everything that happens to come your way, word for word. A great deal of written stuff is not worth your time. Some of it may be. So, a few minutes spent sorting the wheat from the chaff can save you possibly hours of valuable time later on. As a suggestion, you can easily sort reading material into groups like these:

Sort into groups to save time:

- a. The material you don't need to read at all.

Material you don't need.

This may include instructions that don't apply in any way to your work. It may include books or bulletins that are of no value to you. It certainly includes a great deal of material in any daily newspaper -- all the classified ads, all the death notices, and so on. This is the kind of material that simply isn't important to you. Best advice is to get rid of it as soon as you identify it. But don't read it!

- b. The material you may want to refer to later.

For reference later.

This is reference material. After you skim through it, you file it in some way so that you can put your hand on it when you want it. You don't read it until you must.

- c. The material you want to understand thoroughly.

Material you must read carefully.

As you are sorting and skimming through written material, you run across a few things that you decide are really important to you. This is the real reading. Read this material carefully. Re-read it, study it, and spend the time it takes to learn what's in it. Chances are very good indeed that the amount of material that comes to your desk that must be carefully read, is far smaller than that in the two groups preceding.

Too much system may
spoil reading for fun.

There's probably another group of material that you may read for amusement or diversion. Detective stories are in this category, and so are the comics, magazine stories and many novels. You may spoil these if you try too much system on them.

2. Rapid Reading

Sorting may release
most reading up to
90%.

Your sorting process should cut down your required reading substantially. What's left may amount to less than 10 percent of all the reading material that comes your way. This figure doesn't mean much of course, because it depends on the individual, his interests, and how critical he is.

Skim the material you
must read.

Even with the material you're going to read, there's still some sorting to do. It pays to read summaries first. It pays to skim the material, reading only the beginning sentences of the paragraphs. It pays to look at pictures, diagrams, and figures. In approaching this material you're still doing so with critical caution. Could be you don't have to read it after all; perhaps the summary is all you need.

Perhaps the summary is
all you need.

With the final sorting done, you can afford to practice reading the material rapidly. As you try this, remember that you cannot acquire a skill all at once. You have to keep trying.

See and comprehend whole
lines or phrases rather
than individual words.

The "trick" in rapid reading is to see and comprehend more than a single word at a time. The more you can get at a glance, the faster you can read. With practice, you can eventually read a whole line at a time, or possibly more than that. Since many printed lines contain 10 to 15 words, what this means is that you may be able to read 10 to 15 times as fast if you are now a one-word-at-a-time reader.

Practice and conscious
effort is necessary.

One way to practice is to try to see and understand a phrase of several words at a quick glance. Look away from the page as soon as you've glanced at your group of words, and think about what you saw. When you've decided what the phrase meant to you, turn back and read each word of the phrase. Was your idea correct? If not, try again. If it was, try seeing a little larger group of words. Try to whole line once in a while. In the end it will come to you, if you really want to learn badly enough to keep trying.

Progress will be slow
at first.

Short courses may be
available.

What is it worth to you?

Some material must be
read slowly.

To many people who are convinced that they simply cannot hope to read rapidly, all this may seem ridiculous. But great numbers of people have nevertheless become rapid readers through just this sort of process. Progress may be -- usually is -- slow, at first. But the ability to read and comprehend rapidly is worth a great deal in these times when we can learn so much from written material. It is possible in many cities and in many government agencies to get short courses in rapid reading. A supervisor really troubled by a slow reading habit may find it worthwhile to find out where he can get such a course.

The question really is, of course: What would it be worth to you to be able to read 10 times as fast -- or even twice as fast -- as you do now?

One last point needs to be made. This is that some material must be read quite slowly. Some people are able to read at a rate of 600 to 800 words per minute, but they cannot do this -- and comprehend accurately -- with a textbook on mathematics or Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Thus, the rate at which you read must be properly adapted to the material. You alone can judge this.

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